



Educational Oversight: report of the monitoring visit of Schumacher College (The Dartington Hall Trust), November 2017

Section 1: Outcome of the monitoring visit

1 From the evidence provided in the annual return and at the monitoring visit, the review team concludes that Schumacher College (The Dartington Hall Trust) has made acceptable progress with implementing the action plan from the November 2016 [Higher Education Review \(Alternative Providers\)](#).

Section 2: Changes since the last QAA review

2 Schumacher College (the College) offers three postgraduate programmes validated by the University of Plymouth: MSc Holistic Science, MA Ecological Design Thinking, and MA Economics for Transition (including postgraduate certificates and diplomas where applicable). In August 2017, the College offered for the first time an MA Myth and Ecology programme validated by the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD).

3 In November 2017, there were 37 (36 full-time and one part-time) student enrolments compared with 36 (34 full-time and two part-time) students enrolled in 2015-16. There are currently three full-time (including the Head of College) and 10 part-time academic staff.

4 The decision to seek validation of the MA Myth and Ecology with UWTSD was based on curriculum fit, and the College has in place staffing and systems to meet the requirements of the University. The programme is based at the Elmhirst Centre, which has been made available by the Dartington Hall Trust. The decision was also taken to suspend recruitment to the MSc Holistic Science programme for 2017-18, following University of Plymouth procedures; the College is taking the opportunity to review this programme for recommencement in 2018-19.

Section 3: Findings from the monitoring visit

5 The College is making acceptable progress in implementing the action plan arising from the 2016 review. The actions identified have been addressed and reasonable progress is being made on the aspects yet to be completed fully. These relate to: the reporting of the peer review system; making available the digitised archive of visiting speakers through the internet; and implementing the operation of the College Programme Development Handbook. Positive steps have been taken to address the recommendation to extend peer observation across the College. The College continues to consolidate the areas of good practice relating to building on the relationship with the University of Plymouth; the involvement of visiting speakers; and the community ethos underpinning the College. The College is also making progress in addressing the affirmations relating to the development and implementation of the College Development Handbook, and the use of marking rubrics.

6 The College has been proactive in responding to the recommendation to extend the peer observation process. The peer review schedule was agreed at the Quality Committee

meeting in June 2017 and introduced for the autumn 2017 term. In addition, comprehensive documentation to underpin the process was produced and presented at the meeting. Although not all peer observations have been completed, staff spoke enthusiastically of the benefits accruing from the process in providing an opportunity to reflect on their teaching practice and learn from each other. Good practice identified in peer observation reports will feed into action plans and be reported to the Postgraduate Quality Committee in June 2018.

7 The College has built on the good practice identified in the 2016 review. The well-established partnership between the College and the University of Plymouth has been further strengthened through the development of its research activity as part of the College's strategic focus - 'Living Inquiry and Research in Action' - and embodied in the University of Plymouth revised Research Node Agreement. A conference, Leadership of Sustainable Education, is planned for January 2018, which has been organised in collaboration with the University of Plymouth. The Digital Network Manager is leading on the project to make the audio and visual archive of visiting UK and international speakers from the past 25 years available to a wider audience online. This resource is scheduled to be made available in January 2018 and is part of the College's strategic focus. Staff and students spoke very positively of how external speakers contribute to the delivery of the programme offered; students also noted how a number of speakers spent additional time at the College and made themselves available for further discussion. The introduction of a common session in the timetable when all programmes are free to take part in cross-community projects has been well received by the students and builds on the good practice around the community ethos. This development has also allowed the College to strengthen its student support offering.

8 Progress has been made by the College in embedding the affirmations identified in the 2016 report. The draft College Programme Development Handbook has been produced and provides a framework on which to build the design and development of new programmes. The final version is set for implementation in January 2018. Work has been undertaken to formalise the link between assessment criteria and intended learning outcomes, and marking rubrics have been produced for all modules for use in 2017-18. Staff and students confirmed the value and usefulness of these rubrics in helping to understand the requirements of the assessment being undertaken.

9 Comprehensive recruitment and admissions information is clearly detailed and accessible on the College website, and includes information on bursaries and scholarship available, and a link to the admissions policy. The admissions policy was introduced in 2015-16 for operation in the 2016-17 academic year and developed further for use in 2017-18. In reviewing the admissions policy, reference was made to good practice identified by Supporting Professionalism in Admissions, and the UK Quality Code for Higher Education (the Quality Code), *Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education*. Students confirmed that the admissions process was clear and helpful, and that the College's expectations of working at master's level were made apparent. Students further stated that they had been asked for feedback by the College in reviewing the effectiveness of admissions.

10 The College set clear requirements for English language competence and these are stipulated in the admissions policy. There is an English competency test and students are required to achieve IELTS academic scoring 6.5 overall, with a minimum 5.5 for each component; Tier 4 students undertake the UK Visas and Immigration IELTS academic test. Students recognised the need for this requirement and confirmed that the process was supportive and straightforward. Information on prior qualifications required to study on College programmes is readily available on the website. Suitability and genuine intention to study are assessed through an initial structured review of the application form;

a standardised applicant assessment sheet is completed for each subsequent interview undertaken, which was confirmed by staff and students.

11 Annual quality monitoring at the College is secure and systematic. The College follows awarding body policies and procedures, and has undertaken a mapping exercise of activities using the Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review*. In previous years, annual quality monitoring has taken place using University of Plymouth processes and documentation, generating individual programme action plans. Outcomes of quality monitoring are discussed at Programme Committee meetings and a College Action Plan generated. This is set to continue - however, from 2017, the College is also in a new partnership with UWTSD, offering the MA Myth and Ecology. The College has made the necessary arrangements with staff and students to engage with the new annual monitoring requirement, which is detailed in the UWTSD Academic Quality Handbook.

12 The College captures data at module level that is both quantitative and qualitative, and that informs annual monitoring. Students confirmed that they had the opportunity to contribute to quality monitoring both formally and informally, and noted that the College responded to their requests wherever possible. The College has also encouraged the engagement of its alumni in the review of the MSc Holistic Science and included past students on the review panel.

13 There is a range of cohort sizes for the programmes offered; where these are small, this impacts disproportionately on the statistics for retention and achievement. The average numbers of full-time students initially enrolled on individual master's programmes over the three-year period for 2014-17 were 13, nine and 12 respectively. The average retention rates for the same period were 99, 97 and 89 per cent; average achievement rates for completing students were 99 per cent for 2014-15 and 96 per cent for 2015-16. The College identified in its data return the impact of interruptions, deferrals and early withdrawals on the data presented and was able to provide detailed information on individual programme performance.

Section 4: Progress in working with the external reference points to meet UK expectations for higher education

14 The College continues to be recognised as a partner in the UK Government's Chevening Award programme, which is an international awards scheme aimed at developing future global leaders.

15 The Postgraduate Quality Coordinator engages with the Quality Code and is currently working with students to review the College's student engagement activity; the Quality Code, *Chapter B5: Student Engagement* is being used to facilitate this exercise.

Section 5: Background to the monitoring visit

16 The monitoring visit serves as a short check on the provider's continuing management of academic standards and quality of provision. It focuses on progress since the previous review. In addition, it provides an opportunity for QAA to advise the provider of any matters that have the potential to be of particular interest in the next monitoring visit or review.

17 The monitoring visit was carried out by Mike Slawin, Reviewer, and Mike Ridout, Coordinator, on 16 November 2017.

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